

NATURE OF THE TERRITORY

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On the western side of the divide the forest is lower and more open, resembling moderately heavy second growth timber in the eastern United States. In the bottoms grow clumps of tall raffia palms. Forest and open grass lands meet in an irregular line. This line is the real western boundary of the Tanala country. A few of their villages are in the open, but hardly one is out of sight of the forest. [36]

On the eastern side of the divide there is daily rain at all seasons. On the west there is a seasonal change, comparable to that in the plateau, the rainiest months being December to February. Because of the altitude the climate is temperate throughout most of the Tanala country. During the winter season it becomes unpleasantly cold, with frost in the low places and heavy morning fogs that chill one to the bone. Even in summer it is rarely uncomfortably hot. 132

Throughout the whole of the Tanala country there is a multitude of streams and rivers. These are mostly swift, with many falls and rapids so that canoe travel is unprofitable. There are a few small lakes. In the bottoms of some valleys one encounters rather extensive swamps, which become impassable during the rainy season. 133

From the point of view of natural resources, the region is not especially tempting. Wild food is scarce and hard to get and agriculture involves heavy labor in cutting and burning the forest. Grazing is rather poor and cattle do not thrive in such a wet climate. In opposition to this, the forest affords an abundance of good timber. far beyond the local needs, raffia, rubber and other products, and there are considerable deposits of iron ore. The latter are neither rich enough nor extensive enough to be of much value for export purposes. There are also deposits of other valuable minerals, crystal and gold, but these meant nothing to the first settlers. Although there are traces of ancient gold working in many parts of the Tanala territory, the natives do not seem to have mined the gold themselves. [137] 135

Perhaps the greatest gift which the region offers to settlers is a relative immunity from attack. The terrain makes large-scale invasion almost impossible. Moreover, the country was fairly healthy prior to the opening up of regular communication with the coast. People driven from the plateau could settle in the higher forest without fear of the deadly coast fevers. 134

619 The preceding list of Menabe divisions is based on the statements
 631 of several different informants. Checks proved that no one of these
 166 had an accurate knowledge of the composition of the whole group. Moreover, they usually failed to distinguish between lineage, sub-gens and gens. All of them belonged to the Teloarivo Varitra and knew only the larger divisions of the Teloarivo Ataimo. The list is, therefore, both incomplete and inaccurate, but it is the best which could be gotten under the circumstances.

The Zafindiamanana claim descent from Indriamanana, who entered the northern Tanala territory from the Betaileo country eight generations ago, including the present. He had six daughters, from whom the six divisions of this tribe trace their descent. They found the country almost uninhabited. Later some people of Antaimorona stock entered the region, but were absorbed by them. In recent times the Zafindiamanana were subject to the king of Ambohimanga, who was also king of the Manandriana. They submitted voluntarily, on the advice of Andrianampoinerina, founder of the Imerina empire. Prior to this union they had had no chiefs and no castes, being ruled entirely by their village councils and the heads of the lineages.

The Zafimaniry entered the region from the plateau in still more recent times, being forced out of their territory by war. They found some of their present divisions in the territory and incorporated them. Their culture is still largely of plateau type.

The Zafakotry and Manandriana proper are of very mixed origin. Some of their sub-gentes claim Arab descent and most of them apparently came in from the east coast. In historic times the Zafakotry were the noble gens of the Manandriana confederacy. The kingship was vested first in the Zafilambo, later in the Zanavavy.

631 The sub-gentes in all the groups were small. The Zanavavy had
 361 three villages of approximately fifty houses each, the Betsiratsy, two of eighty houses each, and the Zafilambo, three of fifty houses each.

241 fern and low bushes and the second planting never yields as good
 crops as the first. Because of this, the natives try to clear new land
 each season, going farther and farther from their villages. There is
 little effort to keep the fire within bounds and if the season is dry
 • [360] large areas of uncut timber are often burned over. The result is a
 wholesale destruction of large timber and the final exhaustion of the
 lands about a village. When this occurs, the village must be moved
 to new territory but, curiously enough, the natives never gave land
 exhaustion as a reason for such movements. The village will move
 [791] on the advice of an *ombiasy* ("medicine-man"), who will assign some
 supernatural reason for the crop failures.

241 When the land is inconveniently far from the village, the people
 423 camp there, building small, temporary houses. Among the Menaka
 596 the members of each lineage formerly camped and worked together,
 as a protection from enemy raids. When a section of land was to be
 cleared and burned, the heads of families marked out sectors along
 its front and each family cleared back into the jungle as far as it
 thought necessary to provide food for the year. The families thus
 had strips of crop land of approximately equal width, but of a length
 proportionate to their industry. The crops were the absolute property
 of the family, but the land reverted to the lineage and was reappor-
 tioned at the next burning. At the present time, this method has
 largely lapsed, and families are holding and working their *terre*
 independently.

241 Seed for rice and other crops is usually collected shortly after the
 harvest and kept in joints of bamboo, small cloth bags, etc. These
 are hung up in the dwelling, over the fireplace, so that the smoke
 will help to protect them from insects. Sometimes wood ashes are
 mixed with the seed for the same reason. In a few houses I found
 [513] soft bags of matting, stuffed with seed rice, in use as pillows. Seed
 beans are sometimes kept in peculiar baskets made in imitation of
 clusters of bean pods (Fig. 1, c, d).

241 As far as I could learn, no special importance is attached to the
 787 selection of seed. There are no seed gathering ceremonies, no charms
 are placed with the seed, and there is no attempt to increase its yield
 by magical means. Seeds are usually soaked in warm water before
 planting, but this is not a universal practice.

Apparently no rites to promote fertility are performed at planting
 time. This is rather curious in view of the wide occurrence of such
 rites in connection with Asiatic rice culture, but I am convinced that
 if they ever existed among the Tanala they have been forgotten.

ECONOMIC LIFE

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take the place of heavy rope. The latter are considered better than rope for very heavy work, such as the erection of memorial columns.

DWELLINGS

In describing Tanala dwellings it is necessary to distinguish sharply between the Zafimaniry and the rest of the tribe. The former still live, for the most part, in strongly built wooden houses identical with those used by the Betsileo in ancient times. They are beginning to adopt mud houses, like those of the modern plateau natives. The other Tanala gentes build their dwellings of bamboo, leaves of the Traveller's Palm, etc., and show no tendency to adopt the mud houses. In this they conform to the culture pattern of the east coast tribes.

All Tanala houses are grouped in villages. This was originally a defensive measure, but even now, when the danger of attack has ceased, they show no tendency to live in isolated families.

Tanala dwellings, aside from those of the Zafimaniry, show only minor differences. In general, those of the northern gentes are rather larger and better built than those of the southern ones. All the houses are rectangular and oblong, with gabled roofs. The average dwelling is about 20 feet long by 10 to 12 feet wide, but the dimensions vary greatly. The interior height is usually 10 to 12 feet at the ridgepole and 5 to 6 feet at the walls. The houses are always oriented with their long axis north and south.

The entire house is raised on posts, the floor being 18 inches to 2 feet above ground at the closest point. As houses are often built on steep slopes, the clearance may be as much as 5 feet at the lower end. The space between the posts is often filled in with stones, to prevent enemies from crawling under and spearing the inhabitants through the floor. A rectangular enclosure of planks or bamboo, near the south end, supports a block of earth which rises to the level of the floor and serves as a fireplace.

The framework of the house usually consists of three main timbers, one at either end and one in the center, a ridgepole, corner posts, stringers at the top and bottom of the walls, rafters and door frames. Another type of framework may be seen in the accompanying drawing (Fig. 18, e). Except for the stringers and door frames, the timbers are simply peeled, not dressed. The main vertical timbers are usually planted in the ground.

The floor is made from planks or from a mat of split and flattened bamboo woven in checkerwork (see Matting and Basketry). Beside

352 ~~are~~ in use. These are made from three long strips of cloth sewn together side by side and at the ends. They are hung from the rafters and reach to the floor, the lower edges being tucked in under the sleeping mat.

342 The Tatala houses are comfortable and well adapted to the climate, the only disadvantage being that they are rather smoky.

356 The fire is kept going constantly, and in time the rafters and inside of the thatch become thoroughly blackened. For some reason, perhaps the general humidity, this smoke deposit is as glossy as black lacquer and gives a really decorative effect. Most of the houses are kept scrupulously clean. The floor mats are changed frequently, and the whole house swept at least once a day. Brooms made from palm splints and dust pans of matting are employed (Fig. 18, c, d).

342 There seems to be no special ceremonies attendant on house building or on first entering the new house, although the work is usually begun on an auspicious day. One informant mentioned a charm for house building, but I could not learn its composition or how it was used.

The Zafimaniry dwellings are also rectangular and are oriented in the same way as those of the rest of the tribe, but they are greatly superior in workmanship and solidity (Fig. 18, g). They seem to be identical with the houses used by the Betalao at the beginning of the historic period, and the Zafimaniry no doubt brought the type with them when they fled from the plateau.

The houses are rather small, the largest rarely being more than 15 feet long, and are rather wide in proportion to their length, some being almost square. They are usually built on terraces or on stone-faced earth platforms 18 inches to 2 feet 6 inches high. If on a terrace, a ditch 18 inches wide and of the same depth is dug round the house about 2 feet out from the walls, for drainage. The disposition of the houses in villages is very irregular and hardly two will be at the same level.

335 All the main timbers are made of hard wood and are carefully squared and dressed. The three main posts are oblong in section, 3 to 4 inches thick and 8 to 10 inches wide at the base, tapering to about 6 inches wide at the top. They are firmly planted in the ground at either end and in the center of the house, their broad faces being at right angles to its long axis. The center post is usually slightly larger than the other two. Their tops are deeply notched to receive the ridgepole, which is also of hard wood, round, and about 4 inches

424 even to his sons until he thinks he is about to die. Loans and other business transactions involving money are always made publicly, in the presence of witnesses, even when they are between members of the same lineage.

425 In discussing the Tanala ideas of property it is necessary to distinguish at the outset between land and property of all other sorts. To understand the native attitude toward land, the local conditions must be kept in mind. In pre-European times the population was sparse and apparently almost static. The villages lay far apart, each one surrounded by a great stretch of uninhabited forest. The natural supply of forest products and of land for pasture always exceeded the local needs. Moreover, the lazy method of agriculture required that the land be allowed to lie fallow for from five to ten years between plantings. Under such conditions there was little incentive for individual ownership.

426 In pre-European times the ultimate ownership of land was vested in the village. Each village owned a definite territory whose limits were established at the time it was founded. The boundaries were usually rivers, mountain ranges or other natural divisions. 427 The villages were jealous of their rights and serious trespass, such as pasturing cattle or cutting trees, would result in war. Transfer of land between lineages of the same village was permissible and not uncommon, but its sale to outsiders was impossible without the consent of the council. Actually, it was so rare as to be almost unknown.

The ownership of land within the village stockade was vested in the various lineages, except for the *kisasa* ("village square"), which was common property. Each lineage owned a ward, which was usually a segment extending from the *kisasa* to the stockade (see The Village). If a lineage grew too large for its ward, all the members contributed to buy land from the adjoining lineages. When one or more families withdrew to form a new lineage, the ward was divided.

233 Among the Menabe, fallow land and virgin jungle were, for all practical purposes, held in common. A villager was entitled to place beehives, set traps and gather timber and forest products on any land which was not in use. Cattle could also be pastured anywhere, those of the entire village usually being kept in a single herd. For agricultural purposes the land was, at least in theory, divided into sectors running from the village to the limits of its territory. Each sector lay in the same direction with regard to

596 Thus, while the village and gens are permanent units, the lineages of which they are composed are constantly dissolving and changing, a given lineage rarely persisting more than four generations.

596 The lineage is a direct outgrowth of the family. It has already
554 been said that married sons build their houses close to that of the father and that they and their children are under his control as long as he lives. If the brothers are friendly to each other, as is usually the case, they continue to live together after his death, keeping the family land holdings and cattle herd intact. The eldest son becomes the head of the group, in the father's place. He directs the common activities, settles internal disputes and acts as its representative in councils and minor sacrifices. His position is almost like that of the father and he is shown great respect by the other members. At the same time, he has no legal authority over his brothers or their children and must gain his ends by persuasion. As he usually receives more of the father's property than the younger sons, he is generally the richest member of the group and strengthens his position by gifts and loans to the rest. When he dies, his eldest son succeeds to the leadership and the group holds together until split by some serious internal dispute. The reason for such disputes is usually economic, but jealousy is also important in the third and fourth generations. A rich man who cannot succeed to the leadership of the lineage will often demand his share of the common property and found a new lineage.

The members of each lineage live together in a separate ward within the village. They herd their cattle together and help each other in making the *avy* ("fields for hill rice"). All contribute to the support of poor and old members and, at funerals, all are assessed according to their wealth. Individual property rights are fully recognized, but there is a good deal of informal communism. Within the limits set by good taste, any member may use the tools, etc., belonging to any other, even in his absence. Food is shared freely.

[454] In many cases the members will deposit their money with the head of the lineage, who acts as a sort of banker.

Blood ties between members of the same lineage are felt to be almost as close as those between members of the same family. Men and women use the same terms of relationship for each other as for actual brothers and sisters. Marriage within the lineage, although permitted in some cases, is generally frowned upon.

THE VILLAGE

621 Until very recent times, isolated dwellings have been unknown
361 among the Tanala, due to the constant danger of attack. The village

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

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organization is now breaking down and the following description applies to conditions among the Menabe fifty to seventy-five years ago. All the Tanala lived in villages of from fifty to eighty families. These villages were built in defensive positions, usually on hilltops, and were fortified by log palisades 10 to 12 feet high and often by deep ditches as well. There was always a ditch at the gate with a narrow bridge of earth leading to the entrance. The bridge was broken down if the villagers learned of an impending attack. In the center of the village there was an open space, long if the village was long and round if it was round, which was called the *kienzo*. Bordering on this there was a large house, called by some gentes the *trono le*, by others the *lope*. This was usually to the east of the *kienzo*, but might be to the north or south, never to the west. It was used as a residence by the village chief or the head of one of the lineages. The *kienzo* and *trono le* were employed for assemblies of all sorts.

The village was divided into wards, each the property of a lineage. As a rule, each ward fronted on the *kienzo* and extended back to the palisade. The number of wards in a village was variable, ranging from two to ten or more. In general old villages showed the greatest number, due to the formation of new lineages through internal disputes. At least in theory, the land belonging to each lineage lay in the same direction in relation to the village that its ward occupied in relation to the *kienzo*. When a village moved, each lineage took up a ward and land in the same relative position at the new site. This arrangement was not correlated with differences in social rank or prestige, nor was one direction considered more desirable than another. The only explanation given by the Menabe was that this was an ancient custom.

There were certain things which belonged to the village as a whole. The *tepanony* was a charm or fetish concocted by an *ombiasy* at the time the village was founded. It was believed to protect the villagers from sickness, lightning, and the attacks of malevolent ghosts, but did not protect against enemies. It was buried inside a small stone enclosure in the *kienzo* (see Manufacture and Use of Charms). Although great importance was attached to it, it figured little, if at all, in the religious and ceremonial life of the villagers. The village sacred place, always outside the palisade and sometimes a mile or more away, was used for all the more important rites. Here the stones commemorating the dead were set up and the sacrifices made to the ancestors, without distinction of lineage. Each village also had its tomb or tombs, varying from one to three in number, which

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361 were used by all the lineages indiscriminately. The tombs were
779 hidden in dense forest, never less than a half hour's march from the
village and usually more (see Tombs).

361 Villages were moved on y if they had been taken and sacked by
764 an enemy, or if an *ombiasy* advised removal. In either case the new
site was chosen by an *ombiasy*. The villagers carried along their
sacred place and buried it in the bosom of the new village. The sacred
place was abandoned, the sacrifices being performed at temporary
altars until deaths had occurred at the new site and memorial stones
had been erected. Corpses were carried back to the old tombs for a
time, then new tombs were built and all the bodies transferred.

361 New villages, as distinct from removals, were founded as a result
778 of quarrels between factions within a village. One or more lineages
would secede in a body and settle at a new site. The place would be
chosen by an *ombiasy*, who would also construct a new *ispany* for
them. The new village would continue to use the sacred place and
tombs of the old village for a time, but would establish its own as
soon as possible.

THE GENA

618 The gena was the largest social or governmental unit recognized
by the primitive Tanala. All larger groupings are directly traceable
to outside influences. There was no native name for this unit, but
each gena was named and considered itself a separate entity. The
members of a gena always occupied a continuous territory, the limits
of their land being marked by various natural boundaries such as
rivers, ridges, etc. Trespass on this territory by members of another
gena was cause for war. If, as sometimes happened, one or more
lineages migrated to a distance, the emigrants soon lost touch with
the parent body and founded a new gena.

In theory, membership in a gena was based on descent from a
common ancestor in the male line and each gena had arisen through
the gradual expansion of a single lineage. Traditionally, these
lineages entered the country separately and at different times, some
coming from the coast, others from the plateau. Each lineage founded
a village, new lineages and villages arising through increasing popula-
tion and internal disputes. Actually, the Merabe also recognized
descent in the female line as giving gena membership, if it was coupled
with residence with the mother's group. Although informants always
gave male descent as the basis, all admitted that their own gentes
included illegitimate children of gena women and outside fathers,